Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Employment Workshop for F-1 International Students
Pre-quiz: What do you know about OPT?

- Do you need a job offer to apply for OPT? **NO**
- How long does it take USCIS to process an OPT application? **3-4 months**
- Can you change jobs on OPT? **YES**
- How many hours minimum must you work per week to maintain status on OPT? **20 hours**
- What is the maximum number of hours per week you can work with OPT? **40 hours**
- Does an unpaid internship count as OPT employment? **YES**
- Can you travel outside of the US on OPT? **MAYBE 😊**
When are you graduating?
Let’s Talk About:

1. What is OPT
2. Who is Eligible
3. OPT Timeline
4. Acceptable OPT Employment
5. Job Searching
6. Travel & OPT
7. Tax Compliance & Health Insurance
8. Reporting Requirements
9. Application Process
10. Next steps
What is OPT?

• Optional Practical Training is a benefit available to students in valid F-1 status

• Off campus work authorization for 12 months of work **directly related to major field** of study listed on your OPT I-20

• Work authorization for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, issued by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services)

• Students can apply for 12 months of OPT upon competition of each higher educational level
Eligibility:
You are eligible for OPT if you...

✔ Maintained a valid F-1 student status
✔ Enrolled full-time for at least one academic year (2 academic semesters)
✔ Have no holds/no balance in MyView
✔ Have not been approved for OPT for the same or higher education level
✔ Completed fewer than 365 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training at the degree level for which you are applying for OPT
✔ Completed all coursework but are in final stages of thesis/dissertation
✔ Have not already departed the U.S. after the program completion date
✔ Have attended an OPT workshop 😊

Note: students in STEM eligibility who wish to apply for an OPT Extension have additional eligibility requirements
Eligibility:
You are **NOT** eligible for OPT if you...

- Used 12 months or more of full time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- Have not been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year (2 academic semesters)
- You are out of status (violated your immigrations status)

**EXAMPLE:**

- Failure to enroll full time
- Failure to follow immigration procedure when changing schools
- Working without proper authorization
Types of OPT:

1. **PRE-Completion OPT** (before completion of studies)
   - If you have obtained offer for work and are not able to be authorized for CPT
   - If you have completed all of your academic coursework and are only working on graduate thesis/dissertation
   - Must re-apply for POST-completion OPT
   - Takes away from 12 months of Post-completion OPT
   - Cannot hold GRA & do OPT at the same time

2. **POST-Completion OPT** (after completion of studies)
   - If you will be graduating in the current semester and want to work after completion of studies

*completion of studies is the last day of the finals in the semester in which you complete your last degree requirement. NOT the same as GRADUATION.
OPT & Thesis/Dissertation Students

- A student who only has the thesis or equivalent remaining may either apply for PRE-completion OPT (full-time) or POST-completion OPT while completing the thesis/dissertation

- In most cases you would choose POST- completion OPT
IMPORTANT DATES ON OPT

ARE YOU READY?

Let’s do this...
**OPT Timeline: FALL 2019 Graduates**

**Application Window:**
- 90 days prior program end date
- 60 days after

Apply up to 90 days prior graduation
- **Sep. 15, 2019**

**Program End Date on I-20**
- **Dec. 14, 2019**

90 days

**OPT START DATE:**
- Choose Any day within 60 days
- Last date: **Feb. 12, 2020**

12 months of OPT

**Maintaining F-1 status**
- Work min 20 hrs./week
- Max 90 days of Unemployment
- SEVP Portal Reporting

**60 days to:**
- Depart US
- Transfer to another school
- Change visa category
- Cannot re-entry
- Cannot work

60 days to:
- Depart the U.S.

EAD card end date: Last day to work unless STEM extension
- **FEB 2021**
OPT Timeline: Spring 2020 Graduates

Application Window:
- 90 days prior program end date
- 60 days after

Program End Date on I-20
- May 16, 2020

OPT START DATE:
- Choose Any day within 60 days
- Last date: July 15, 2020

Maintaining F-1 status
- Work min 20 hrs./week
- Max 90 days of Unemployment
- SEVP Portal Reporting

EAD card end date:
- Last day to work unless STEM extension
- July, 2021

60 days to:
- Depart US
- Transfer to another school
- Change visa category
- Cannot re-entry
- Cannot work

60 days Grace Period

90 days

60 days Grace Period

12 months of OPT

Depart the U.S.

Application Window:
Apply up to 90 days prior graduation
- Feb 16, 2020

Program End Date on I-20
- May 16, 2020

OPT START DATE:
- Choose Any day within 60 days
- Last date: July 15, 2020

Maintaining F-1 status
- Work min 20 hrs./week
- Max 90 days of Unemployment
- SEVP Portal Reporting

EAD card end date:
- Last day to work unless STEM extension
- July, 2021

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- Work min 20 hrs./week
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EAD card end date:
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60 days to:
- Depart US
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- Change visa category
- Cannot re-entry
- Cannot work

60 days Grace Period
Post-Completion OPT

1. Must be completed within 14 months of finishing your academic program
   - Select acceptable authorization dates within this time frame
   - 12 months of work + 60 days grace period

2. Processing time – 90+ (could be up to 5 months)
   - Apply early enough to allow time for processing
   - Applications processed at end of semester or during grace period may lose time
OPT Start Date

- The day you can begin working
- The date on your EAD card
- You can only start working when you receive your EAD
- No employment authorization between graduation and your approved OPT start date – on campus or off campus
OPT Start Date Tips

1. **Using “Early” start date is better if:**
   - You have an employer offer
   - Would like to be available for employment right after program completion

2. **Using “Later” start date is better if:**
   - You do not have any employment offers at the time of the OPT application
   - You do not expect that you will be able to secure employment soon after program completion
   - You submitted your application late (e.g. during the 60 day grace period)

Choose a realistic start date, keeping in mind USCIS processing times
Late OPT Applications

- If you apply late in the filing period, your OPT start date on the EAD card will be the day the USCIS officer approves your OPT, so you may receive less than 12 months of OPT.

- Go by the date listed on your EAD card, which could be different than the date you requested if you applied later.
Employment on OPT

- Can change employers (have to report to SEVP Portal)
- Any location, any employer in U.S.
- Can have multiple employers at the same time
- Choose appropriate employment that is:
  - directly related to your field of study
  - equal with level of education you have just completed
Employment includes:

- 20 hours per week or more
- Self-employment
  - Consulting / contract work
  - Keep detailed records: Job dates and hours per week worked
  - Starting your own business
  - Good record keeping is a must: viable business (appropriate licenses, clientele etc.)
- Unpaid
  - Internships
  - Volunteering
What is “Volunteering”? 

“Volunteering” for work is only permitted: 
- If the work is in your field of study

Don’t “work for free” (volunteering to do a job normally performed by employees) and don’t let employers take advantage of you

“Volunteering” in your field of study until work authorization begins is considered working without authorization

SAY NO to: Job-related orientation, HR training or volunteering before you receive your OPT card
UNEMPLOYMENT: The clock starts ticking...

- 90 days of unemployment or less during 12 month OPT
- Cumulative
- Unemployment begins counting on start date on EAD card
- Weekends count
- If you reach 90 days of unemployment, you must leave the U.S. the next day.
  - No grace period
  - If you don’t report & update SEVP Portal your SEVIS record will automatically terminate which cancels OPT authorization
Managing Unemployment

What should you do if unemployed?

- Look for an unpaid internship or volunteer opportunity
- If you hit 60 days of unemployment, make alternate plans
  - Return to study
  - Return home
Using your Resources:

- Use your networks – who can help you?
  - Database of UMSL OPT students
- Career Services
- LinkedIn UMSL: ASK
  [http://www.umsl.edu/services/intelstu/Alumni/umslconnect.html](http://www.umsl.edu/services/intelstu/Alumni/umslconnect.html)
- RBC Young Professionals Network
  [http://www.stlrbc.org/youngprofessional.htm](http://www.stlrbc.org/youngprofessional.htm)
Networking opportunity!!!

DON’T WAIT TO REGISTER FOR THE UMSL FALL 2019 INTERNSHIP & JOB FAIR

Friday, September 27 | 10am - 2pm | Mark Twain Building

For more information & to register visit UMSL.EDU/GO/FALLFAIR19

Register by September 25 for free admission

UMSL Career Services

Free Professional Headshots
Connect with 100+ Employers
Download the FAIRS app for easy preparation
Talk OPT to your Employer

- You can mention OPT in your resume or cover letter, but you don’t have to
- You may know more about OPT than your employer
- Educate yourself about other visa statuses like H-1B
Remember:

- Once you have applied for OPT, it’s very difficult to cancel it, change your graduation or work application.

- If you are not sure about the start date, let’s talk!

- Check on your I-20 date (it must be valid until at least your graduation date).

- You must have your EAD card in hand before starting working.
While on OPT...you are still ours (UMSL’s)

- UMSL is still your sponsor and you are still in F-1 status
- Keep your passport valid **6 months** ahead
- Reporting any changes within **10 days**
  - Name, residence and/or mailing address
  - The name and address of all employers on OPT
  - The start and end date of all OPT employment
  - Keep records of anything job related: offer letters, contracts, paychecks
- **SEVP Portal:**
  - [studyinthestates.dhs.gov](http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov)
  - If you get locked out, you need to contact ISSS 😊
While on OPT...

• Social Security Number
  • You will need one when you are working
  • Apply when filling out I-765 form
  • Will arrive separately from your EAD, but around the same time

• Taxes
  • You pay taxes on any money earned (income)
  • Consulting/contract work
  • Self-employment
  • If less than 5 years in the US, you are eligible to use UMSL nonresident tax assistance. Inquire in February
While on OPT...

- **Health insurance**
  - You need to maintain it
  - You can purchase UMSL’s health insurance plan if you like – not automatic: [aetnastudenthealth.com/umsl](aetnastudenthealth.com/umsl)
  - Your coverage goes through December 31st or July 31st
Travel on OPT

- Not recommended traveling while OPT is pending!!!
- To successfully re-enter the U.S. while on post-completion OPT, you must have:
  - OPT I-20 with valid travel signature
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - EAD card / proof of OPT approval
  - Job offer letter (preferred)
- If your visa is expired, visa renewal is a risk while on post-completion OPT – plan accordingly!
One time, **24 month** extension of Post-completion OPT (total of 12+24=36 months)

**Eligibility criteria**: (c 3 C)
- Earned a B.C., Master’s or Ph.D. in an UMSL major that is STEM eligible
- Employer is **E-verify** registered

**Unemployment**: what is left out of 90 days of OPT + another 60 days (total of 150 days)
H1-B Work Visa & Cap Gap Extension

- H-1B is most common type of work visa
- Filed by your employer
- Dual intent (as opposed to non-immigrant)
- Two types of H-1B:
  - Cap-exempt employers – typically in public sector
    - Universities, non-profit organizations, government entities, etc.
  - Cap-Subject employers – typically private sector
    - Only certain number of visas are released (“Cap”) per fiscal year
    - April 1st is the first day to file the H1-B petition
    - All cap-subject can start working on October 1st – beginning of fiscal year
    - Cap-Gap extension allows to bridge the time between end of the EAD permission until the effective H-1B start date – no application is required
After OPT...

- **60 Day grace period**
  - From end date listed on EAD
  - **No work** authorization during grace period

- **Life is unpredictable -> Keep all:**
  - I-20 documents
  - EADs
  - Communication from USCIS
OPT Application Process:

1. **Submit** the OPT Application Packet to ISSS
   - Prepare **all documents** listed on OPT checklist
   - Make an appointment with Lenka Garimella ([lenka.garimella@umsl.edu](mailto:lenka.garimella@umsl.edu))
   - Receive **2 copies of OPT I-20** (1 for USCIS, 1 for you)

2. **Mail** your OPT Application to USCIS
   - Using UEMS (eShipGlobal) [study.eshipglobal.com/register](http://study.eshipglobal.com/register)
   - I-20 must be received by USCIS **within 30 days** from the day requested

3. **Receipt notice (I-797c)** will arrive within 2-4 weeks

4. Your **EAD card** will arrive 3-5 months of receipt notice date You can then check the status of your application on-line

5. You will receive email from **SEVP Portal**: follow instructions and establish your profile
A note about photos

• **Passport Center at UMSL** - $15
  • 366 SSB
  • Call 314-516-5753 or email passport@umsl.edu for an appointment
• Must be recent: taken within 30 days of filing your application

• Pencil/sharpie your: Name First name & LAST NAME, DOB
Filling out Checks 101

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Your Name
123 Your Street
Your Hometown, State 12345

Pay to the Order of
US Department of Homeland Security

March 1, 2012
Date

Your Signature

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ABA/Routing Number
Account Number
Check Number

= = $410.00 = =

fourhundredandten 00/100
I-765 Application: How to fill out guide

- Download from uscis.gov latest version of:
  - I-765
  - G-1145

- Tips for filling I-765
  - Must be printed, no handwriting except your signature!
  - Only LAST NAME should be in all CAPs (UPPER CASE LETTERS)
  - Use your UMSL email
  - SAMPLE I-765 will be emailed to you when you request OPT Appointment
  - Print single sided and don’t staple!

- Copy of I-94 can be printed from here: i94.cbp.dhs.gov
Part 6 of I-765

- Page 7 of I-765, Part 6
- Include all previous SEVIS ID #
- All OPTs (Pre & Post)
- All CPTs
- Academic level at which it was authorized
**USCIS Processing**

- **Correspondence from USCIS**
  - I-797c (Notice of Receipt): 2 weeks
  - Request for Evidence (RFE) – contact ISSS immediately
  - **Approval Notice**: within 90 days
  - SEVP Portal Email notification – follow instructions
  - Denial Notice: contact ISSS immediately
  - Everything sent to address listed on I-765 – it will not be forwarded (please use ISSS office address if you are moving)

- **90+ Day processing period**
  - Check status of application online using case number [egov.uscis.gov/processing-times](http://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times)
  - If no response within 90 days from receipt date, contact ISSS
Questions?

- Come to 362 SSB
- Email or call for an appointment
  lenka.garimella@umsl.edu, 314-516-6780
OPT Lingo: Part 1

- **OPT**: Optional Practical Training
- **CPT**: Curricular Practical Training (Off Campus Work Permit during studies)
- **I-20** SEVP issued form, provides supporting info on student’s status
- **I-765** – Application for Employment Authorization
- **I-797c** – Notice of Action (receipt notice from USCIS)
- **I-797** – Approval Notice
- **G-1145** – USCIS form: permission for email/text notification
- **I-94** – arrival/departure records
- **EAD** (I-766) – Employment Authorization Document
- **RFE** – USCIS form for Request for Further Evidence
- **USCIS** – United States Citizenship & Immigration Services
- **SEVP** – Student & Exchange Visitor Program
OPT Lingo: Part 2

- **SEVP Portal** – Tool that lets F-1 students on Post-Completion OPT meet their reporting requirements (Address & Employer updates)
- **SEVIS** – Student & Exchange Visitor Program - database with F-1 records
- **DOB** – Date of Birth
- **MM/DD/YYYY** – Month/Day/Year format e.g. 12/01/2019 standard format in US
- **EIN** – Employer Identification Number OR Federal Employer Identification Number (e.g. 12-3456789)
- **E-Verify #** – 4-7 digits provided by employer who is registered in Everify database
- **USCIS Online Account#** - identical with USCIS# issued on EAD card (e.g. 123-456-789)
- **A-Number** - Alien Registration Number (e.g., A0123456789)